

**Newfields Elementary School
Deliberative Session Minutes
February 3, 2014**

Moderator: John Hayden

Town Clerk: Sue McKinnon

Attendance: School Board Members James McIlroy, Kirsten Lord, Karla Dalton, NES Principal Helen Rist, Esther Asbell, Assistant Superintendant and School District Attorney Gordon Graham.

The meeting was called to order at 6:32pm.

Moderator Hayden led us in the pledge of allegiance and introduced the head table. He briefly explained that the purpose of the meeting was to review, debate and amend, if necessary, the school warrant articles as proposed.

Article 1. Shall the School District raise and appropriate as an operating budget, not including appropriations by special warrant articles and other appropriations voted separately, the amounts set forth on the budget posted with the warrant or as amended by vote of the first session, for the purposes set forth therein, totaling \$2,379,872? Should this article be defeated, the default budget shall be \$2,370,122, which is the same as last year, with certain adjustments required by previous action of the District or by law or the governing body may hold one special meeting, in accordance with RSA 40:13, X and XVI, to take up the issue of a revised operating budget only. The school board and budget advisory committee recommends \$2,379,572 as set forth on said budget.

Chairman James McIlroy stated that the budget was reviewed line by line at the budget hearing. The operating budget is up significantly over last year largely due to an increase in special education. The increase is based on the student population and the needs of the students. Another major change is changing the RTI position (response intervention specialist) to a more professional level than a paraprofessional. The difference between the default budget and the proposed budget is \$9,000. The overall budget is up almost \$200,000 from last year because of special education costs. The special education costs are controlled by law and out of the Boards control.

Tom Hayward asked if the school is noticing an increase in the special education population. James replied that because the school is so small a handful of children can make a big difference. Special education needs will change with the 5th grade graduating and a new population of kindergarten coming in.

A motion was made by Christine Conner to add \$70,000 to the operating budget for the purpose of hiring an additional kindergarten teacher.

Moderator Hayden explained that the overall budget can be increased by \$70,000 but the specific purpose of how to spend the money is up to the School Board and cannot be guaranteed. It will be noted that the wishes of this body voting to amend is for an additional teacher.

Tom Hayward mentioned that if the Board publicly says the \$70,000 will be used for an additional teacher, then that is where it will go.

Maggie Doane asked for an explanation as to why an additional kindergarten teacher is needed.

James McIlroy explained that they project the incoming kindergarten class to be 19 children whom some parents feel are too many. The Board and Principal have considered possible solutions if the class gets too large. One idea was to create a k1 class in addition to having 1 first year class and 1 kindergarten class. They discussed having two half day kindergarten classes to create smaller class sizes. Another option is to have more paraprofessionals working in the classroom; splitting the class and making it smaller. The school no longer has 2 classes per grade. The population of the school was once 170 and then it was down to 120 and now it is up to 140. The Board does not see the necessity at this time to hire an additional kindergarten teacher, only to have to let them go the following year. There are paraprofessionals who currently work at the school who can help out in the classroom.

Currently there are two first grade classes with 14 students in one and 12 in the other. The kindergarten class has 18 students. The largest class in the school has 17 students. There are other ways to address the issue of a large class without hiring a teacher if the money has not been appropriated in the budget. It is up to the principal to determine if additional staff is needed.

Principal Helen Rist talked about multi age classes. The theory is not to place the younger children or older children together but to have a mix and teach a dual curriculum. This could work well with the existing first grade and kindergarten schedule. The RTI coach will also have more time available to work with the kindergarten because the first grades are so small. There are many parents who come in and help out in the classroom which is a great benefit.

Christine Conner asked for clarification on the class totals. Helen Rist explained that the numbers fluctuate weekly with families moving in and out of town. The current

projection for the kindergarten class is 19 students.

Esther Asbell commented on class sizes in surrounding towns; some having as few as 13 students and some having as many as 21.

Tom Hayward said that if we have 19 students in kindergarten this year and break them up with two teachers there would be no need to let the teacher go the next year because they would still be needed.

Helen Rist stated that the first grade curriculum is different than the kindergarten curriculum. The student teacher ratio is much more important in the first grade.

Tom Hayward stated that there is only one certified kindergarten teacher and he questions how the school can bring in an uncertified paraprofessional to assist in the kindergarten classroom. It makes more sense educationally to add a teacher. Helen confirmed that the paraprofessional is certified.

Jennifer Bishop said that she recently moved to town because of the school and knowing class sizes were small. If the numbers are only getting bigger and you're not adding a teacher then the students will get less individual attention. She is concerned with several teachers and aides coming in and out of the classroom and believes it is not a good plan. Her child may get lost in the shuffle. New resident Elise Amarosa agreed.

School Board member Karla Dalton said that this is the first year of growth in five years. There have been kindergarten classes with 19 in the past. It is preferable to have small classes but we need to keep the budget at a level everyone can work with.

Dan Conner asked why the board is not planning on having a co-teacher. James said Helen Rist looks at the school population and educational needs to determine how to organize and schedule the paraprofessionals, certified teachers and special education aides.

Christine Conner was concerned with so many adults being in the kindergarten. It is a large number of bodies for small children to handle with too much going on in the room.

Tom Hayward asked Helen if she had received any complaints this year from parents regarding the kindergarten. He personally has heard complaints from parents who believe there are too many children in the current kindergarten room. Helen has not received any complaints.

Esther Asbell is concerned that voters will vote for the default budget if the proposed budget is \$79,000 more. The percentage of voters who turned out is 32.4 %.

Christine Conner mentioned that she came to the school board several months ago with her concerns about the size of the incoming kindergarten and asked for the board to create a contingency plan. She was never notified of what those plans would be but was told it would be addressed when it was necessary.

Kirsten Lord commented that the Board has been forthright and honest. They are not trying to hide anything from anybody. They are not trying to short the budget and they can only base their decisions on the information in front of them now. In her opinion, Helen has been planning effectively for the upcoming year.

Tom Hayward asked for a vote of the Board to confirm the \$70,000 would be used for a second kindergarten teacher.

John Hayden explained that it is not uncommon to amend the dollar amount of an operating budget but the increase cannot be put forth for a specific purpose; it may be suggested. The recommendation to hire an additional kindergarten teacher is understood. He does not believe the Board has the authority to vote to say they will use the additional money for an additional kindergarten teacher.

Attorney Gordon Graham added that it would be next year's school district that would make the determination not this school board.

James McIlroy stated that if the amendment passes he will interpret the vote as the will of the people to hire another teacher. No one here is out to get anybody. We are all on the same team and he does not appreciate personal attacks towards the intentions of the staff that provide countless hours of service to the town and the children.

Maggie Doane said that increasing the proposed budget is taking a big risk because it may mean the default looks more favorable, especially for those residents on a fixed income. She would much rather go with the recommendations that the school board and principal have presented. She puts her faith in the school board and if they feel another teacher is needed they will find a way to hire another teacher.

Laurie Case commented the she believes the board wants the best for the school. If during the year, it is determined that more help is needed can more people be brought in. Helen said that it can absolutely be done if necessary.

Christine Conner asked if there was a high ratio of special education needs in the projection for next year. Helen confirmed that there is a difference in special education needs next year.

Christine Conner's motion to increase the budget to \$2,449,572 was seconded by Dan

Conner. A vote was taken and the amendment passed with a vote of 9-7.

Article 1 shall be placed on the ballot as amended.

Article 2. Shall the School District vote to approve the cost items included in the collective bargaining agreement reached between the Newfields School Board and the Newfields Staff Association covering the four year period from September 1, 2014 to August 31, 2018 which calls for the following increases in salaries and benefits at the current staffing levels:

Year	Estimated Increase
2014-2015	\$ 5,179
2015-2016	\$ 17,839
2016-2017	\$ 20,491
2017-2018	\$ 25,498

and further to raise and appropriate the sum of \$5,179 for the 2014-2015 fiscal year, such sum representing the additional costs attributable to the increase in salaries and benefits over those of the appropriation at current staffing levels paid in the prior fiscal year?

(Note: This agreement includes a cost savings of \$27,784.00 in the 2014-15 year due to all members of the Newfields Staff Association changing from an Anthem Point of Service health plan to a CIGNA Health Maintenance Organization health plan.)

The School Board recommends the approval of this warrant article.

James McIlroy informed us that the warrant article is the contract with the teachers association. The contract is reasonable and a win, win for all. It includes a longevity bonus plan and increases of 1.5%, 1.75%, 2% and 2.5%, respectively in the years 2014-2018. The health insurance has changed to an HMO with great savings.

There was no discussion and Article 2 shall be placed on the ballot as written.

Article 3. Shall the School District raise and appropriate the sum of \$10,000 to be added to the School Building Maintenance Fund established at the 1992 School District meeting for the purpose of repairing and maintaining school buildings? The School Board recommends this appropriation.

James explained that the \$10,000 is the same amount asked for each year to be placed in the school building maintenance fund. Regular painting of the building is done throughout the year with these funds. Kirsten mentioned that the balance of the fund is

currently \$42,000; enough for the heating unit.

Article 3 shall be placed on the ballot as written.

Article 4. To see if the School District will vote to establish a Special Education Expendable Trust Fund per RSA 198:20-c, for the purpose of funding the unanticipated costs of special education in the district and to raise and appropriate up to \$10,000 to put in the fund, with this amount to come from fund balance; no amount to be raised by taxation; further to name the School Board as agents to expend from the fund. The School Board recommends this appropriation.

James stated this fund would be used if special education needs increase during the school year. The money shall be taken from the unreserved fund balance, which is surplus money. There will be no money raised through taxes for this appropriation. An amendment was proposed for clarification purposes. A motion was made by Karla Dalton and seconded by Mike Price to add the words, "up to" to the article to allow for permission to spend any amount of money up to \$10,000. It was also suggested that the statement, "no amount to be raised by taxation" be added to the article. The motion to amend Article 4 was voted on and passed.

Article 4 shall be placed on the ballot as amended.

James announced that Pam Muller is completing her term as school treasurer. Her term will officially end on June 30, 2014 the end of the fiscal year. Residents are welcome to run as a write-in candidate for school treasurer on the ballot in March. The duties include attending the monthly school board meetings, depositing revenue and paying invoices. The position comes with a small stipend.

Upon motion made and seconded the meeting adjourned at 7:55pm.

Respectfully submitted,

Sue McKinnon

DRAFT